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Chicago Express, 13..... 12 31 a.m.
Accommodation, 88..... 6 44 p.m.
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Accommodation, 80..... 7 48 a.m.
New York Express, 6..... 11 16 a.m.
New York Express, 2..... 3 05 p.m.
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A Blank Marriage Certificate

It Turned Up a Valid One After Twenty Years

By F. A. Mitchel

Every day the readers of fiction demand more and more stories illustrating what is happening among them. Improbable happenings are taboed. Nevertheless stories written many years ago, based on what was then a more or less common occurrence, are still read. The novel "Jane Eyre," by Charlotte Bronte, is one of these favorites.

This story is based on a mock marriage. A century ago British swells seemed to have no conscience in preying upon women. Mock marriages were by no means uncommon. But today we never hear of a mock marriage. This is due largely to a change in the times. Formerly formal certificates were required in marriage. Now any man and woman can acknowledge before witnesses that they are man and wife and the law recognizes the marriage.

During the early part of the nineteenth century there was a noted case of mock marriage between a British nobleman and an American girl. In those days America was a new country, and Englishmen who came over here were prone to look down on Americans. Nevertheless there were descendants, in the eastern states especially, of the younger sons of foreign noblemen, who settled on the American coast when the country was being occupied from abroad, dispossessing the Indians.

Edith Van Wyck, whose progenitor, Hulleger Van Wyck, came from Holland, where Philip II, of Spain was persecuting the Protestants, was a comely young woman, in excellent standing socially in New York. Lord John Turnbull, a son of the Duke of Averton, visited America, met Miss Van Wyck and fell in love with her. He did not consider a marriage with one who had neither fortune nor title, but, desiring to possess her, resorted to a device which was common at the time—that is, he married her, prearranging that she should not be able to prove herself a legal wife.

In those days the elite of New York lived on the southern extremity of Manhattan Island, the Van Wycks' home fronting on the Battery. Young Lord John courted Edith in the space surrounding the fort that gave the name to its location, for it was called the Battery from the guns mounted on it. He was a charming man in every thing except morality, and the young lady fell an easy victim to his wiles.

When they were married the groom handed the officiating clergyman a pen, which he dipped into a gold ink horn that bore the crest of his family, saying that for generations marriage certificates of members of his family had been written with ink from this ink-horn. No one thought to ask why the young lord had brought such a relic to America. There was not the slightest doubt that he was acting in good faith.

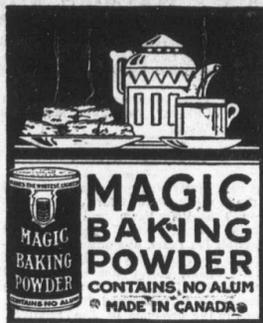
Lord John remained in America three months after his marriage, when he returned to England without his wife. He told her that there would be great objection on the part of his family to his marriage with an American commoner and he must prepare them for the event. Unless he could win his mother over to his side and through her influence his father the latter, who owned a large, unentailed fortune, would disinherit him.

Edith consented to his departing without her, he promising to return to her as soon as he obtained his father's consent to receive her. He set sail in a British ship, and his young wife tearfully watched the vessel from her window as it sailed down the bay.

A month was required to make a voyage to England in those days, and when another month had been added to the first Edith began to look for a letter from her husband. A month more passed and no letter came. Several more passed and still no word from her husband. At last the poor woman began to realize that she was deserted. She believed that her husband had failed to win his father's consent to his marriage and had concluded not to announce it; but, being married to him, she hoped that at some future day she would be acknowledged as his wife.

Meanwhile the Duke of Averton died, and his son, John Turnbull, inherited the title. Then, since his record seemed all right, he was considered a great catch by young women of the nobility.

One day Edith received a shock that brightened her life. A London paper came to America in which there was an announcement of the marriage of her husband to Lady Gladys Armstrong, daughter of the Duke of Mil-



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ford. That her husband had deserted her was a blow; that he had committed bigamy was crushing.
Her family, not being willing to submit to such treatment, took up the case, intending to prosecute Lord Averton for bigamy. The attorney they employed called for the marriage certificate. Edith took it out of a desk in which it had lain since the marriage and before turning it over to her father looked at it. What was her astonishment, her horror, to see that the paper on which it had been written was a blank!

The poor woman then knew that she had been tricked. She delayed turning the paper over or saying anything about it till she had time to think. A little boy had been born to her, and she dreaded the fact of his standing being known to the world. After deliberation she put the paper back where it had been before removal and refused to produce it, saying that she would not consent to a prosecution of Lord John. She resumed her maiden name and brought up her son as Francis Van Wyck.

II.

Twenty years later a young man stepped into a solicitor's office in London and requested him to demand of the Duke of Averton £20,000. When asked his name and why he made such a demand the stranger declined at present to give either. The solicitor declined to take the case, but when the client said that the amount was demanded for the support of a woman the duke had wronged many years before he consented.

Averton winced at the demand, but put on a bold face. He pronounced the case one of blackmail and declined to consider it. When the matter was announced in the newspapers he and his family gave out that the duke, as Lord John, had shown some attention to an American girl he had met in the United States. After a lapse of years she had concluded to claim that he had married her. There was nothing in it.

The case, notwithstanding this statement, excited a good deal of attention in London society, not because that society looked down with scorn upon the betrayal of women by their aristocracy—for in those days the British people regarded the peccadilloes of the nobility with far more leniency than today—but because there was a fear that the family occupying the title and the property might be dispossessed through some unfortunate marriage of the duke when he was sowing his wild oats. When the case came to be tried quite a number of the British aristocracy were present in court.

"We are prepared to prove," said the plaintiff's solicitor, "that about twenty-two years ago, when the Duke of Averton was in America, he married Edith Van Wyck of New York and lived with her as her husband several months, when he deserted her. The couple were married by the Rev. Thomas MacLaren in St. Mark's church, on a street called the Bowery. The officiating clergyman is now dead, but we will furnish a certificate that he was rector of the church at the time of the wedding. We shall also furnish the certificate of marriage written by said MacLaren."

The attorney held up a bit of blank

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paper. The defendant, who was in court, looked at it with evident solicitous interest.

Stepping to a table, the lawyer placed the paper under a microscope and said to the judge:

"Your honor, I desire you to examine this paper and give a ruling on it. Is it or is it not a valid certificate of marriage?"

The judge stepped down from the bench and critically examined the paper by means of the microscope. He saw indentations made with a pen constituting a certificate of marriage between Lord John Turnbull and Edith Van Wyck and signed by Thomas MacLaren. After the examination the judge returned to the bench. The lawyer continued:

"We claim that when the marriage certificate was made out the clergyman was handed an ink horn and a pen by the groom, who stated that marriage certificates had for hundreds of years been written in ink from the said ink horn. The clergyman therefore made out the certificate with ink taken from said ink horn. We claim that the plaintiff had filled the ink horn with ink that after a short period became invisible.

"I have also a certificate from a prominent London scientist that iodine combined with starch, called iodide of starch, will produce an ink that will in a short time entirely fade away. We charge the Duke of Averton at that time with procuring the writing of the certificate with iodide of starch, which will fade and cannot be reproduced. I therefore ask your honor to accept these pen indentations as a certificate of marriage between the defendant and the plaintiff."

While this address was being spoken Averton turned ghastly pale.

The judge took time for consideration, then ruled that the certificate was a valid document.

Each member of the jury was given an opportunity to examine the paper through a microscope. The foreman read aloud a certificate given by the officiating clergyman that he had married Edith Van Wyck and John Turnbull in the city of New York on a certain date. The reading was effected by the pen indentations on the paper. After all had seen it the judge instructed the jury to accept it as valid testimony.

That settled the case in favor of Edith Van Wyck, Duchess of Averton. She was adjudged such by the court, which made the duke a bigamist and his London family illegitimate.

The young man who prosecuted the case was the son of the defendant. As soon as he had won a verdict in his mother's favor he entered upon negotiations for the payment by the duke of an annuity to his mother, and the case was thus settled. The Duke of Averton was never brought to trial for bigamy owing to his influence with the British cabinet.

His son returned to America, where he continued to live under the name of Van Wyck and became an eminent jurist in New York. His mother after her vindication returned to her social position and became a leader. She died during the war days of 1863.

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